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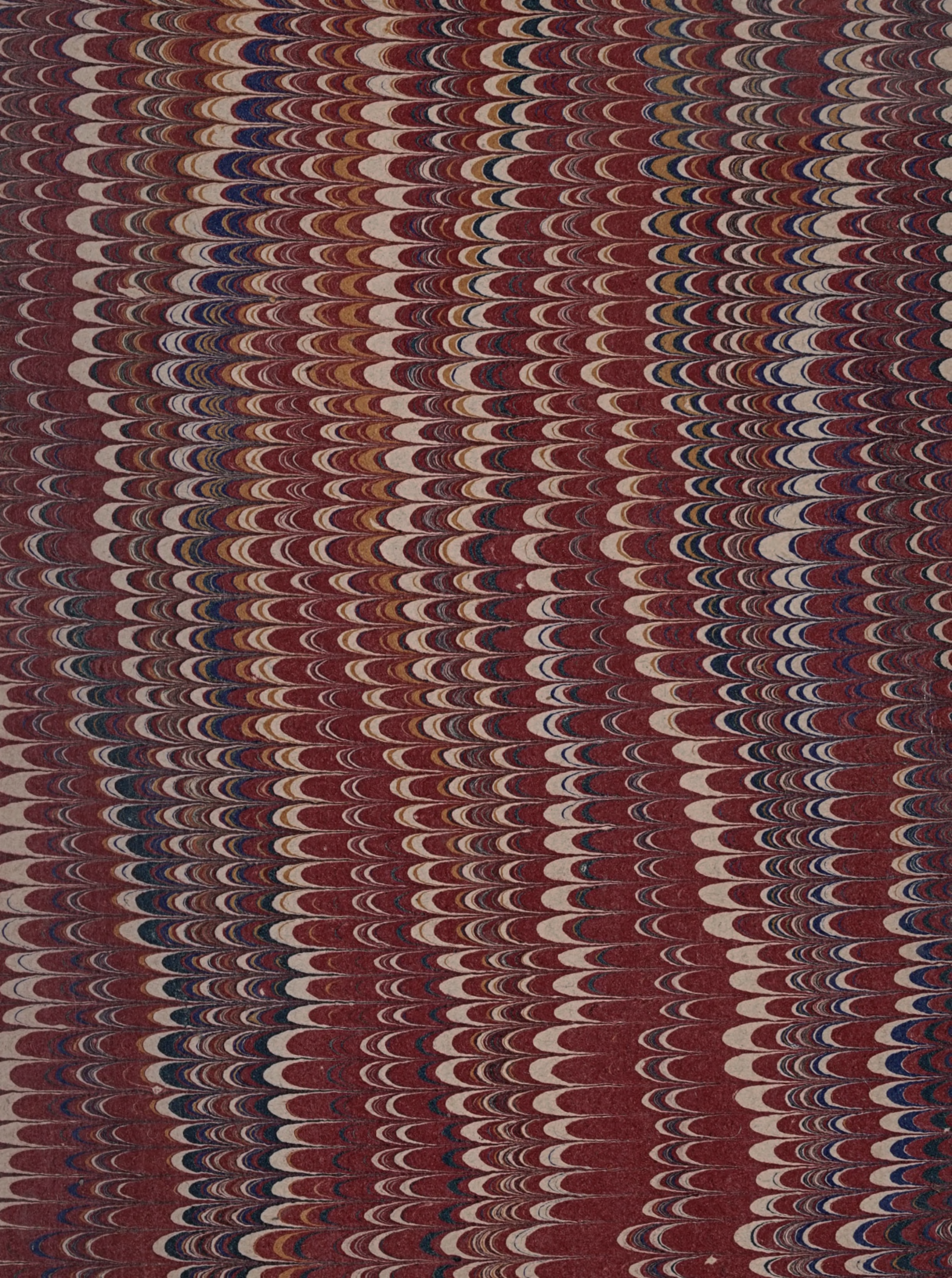
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The
Birthday Gifts.

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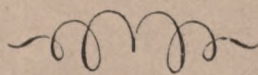
THE

BIRTHDAY GIFTS:

A

STORY FOR WIVES.

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NEW YORK

SUTTON, BOWNE & CO.

1867.

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1867

THE BIRTHDAY GIFTS.

A STORY FOR WIVES.

CHAPTER I.

"O JULIA! I never saw anything so beautiful!" May Clayton exclaimed, as her dear friend Julia Waring opened a tiny jewel case, and brought to light from its soft nest of white velvet, a magnificent solitaire diamond ring, and held it up for mutual admiration.

"Yes; isn't it elegant? and such a surprise too, for yesterday when I modestly hinted that I would be twenty-one to-day, Charley looked unconcerned, and said something silly about stamps, thereby giving me to understand that I might as well give up all idea of a present this year. Though, to tell the truth, Mamie *mia*, in my wildest dreams I did not go beyond that coral set we both admired in Tiffany's window the other day. But, is it not beautiful?" and Mrs. Waring slipped the glittering circlet on her wedding ring finger, and as it caught the rays of light, and held them lovingly in its heart, golden and azure and red, the jewel was truly magnificent.

"Yes indeed Julia! It is a gift worthy of a princess, and therefore, of your own right royal self! but, don't put on airs please, because you have such a splendid gift, and despise my humble offering" said Mrs. Clayton as she placed in her

friend's hand a pair of beautifully embroidered satin slippers, tiny enough for Cinderella in the fairy story.

"You precious old darling! Mamie Clayton you must have made these in a fit of inspiration!" merry Jule Waring exclaimed, as she caught her friend around the neck, and kissed her affectionately. "'There's a kiss for every bead, and a squeeze for every loving stitch, and a thousand thanks besides."

"Is'nt it rather a singular coincidence that our birthdays should occur on the same day?"

"Yes, we are twin sisters only that we have two mothers, and I have been busy a whole week trying to get this little trifle ready for your ladyship's acceptance," and Mrs. Waring drew from her pocket a handkerchief heavily trimmed with valenciennes, with the initials M. C. daintily embroidered in its tiny cambric centre. "But it is'nt half so pretty as these slippers so I shall have to pale my ineffectual fires after all. There! don't say another word please, but tell me how Russell did honour to the occasion. What was his gift?"

"Guess."

"A new piano?"

"No."

"What then, a Florence Sewing Machine?"

"O no! I have one already."

"Well, let me think, a silver tea set?"

"No again dear, and as I know you would not guess in a month, I'll show you," and so pretty Mrs. Clayton stepped to her bureau, opened a drawer, and took therefrom a document enclosed in a long buff envelope, and placed it quietly in the hand of her friend.

“Good gracious May! What is this? a college diploma, a deed of a brown stone house, or a last will and testament? It looks dreadful enough for anything. Say Mollie, what does it mean?”

“It means dear Julia, that Russell has assured his life with the ‘Equitable Life Assurance Society of the United States,’ for the sum of ten thousand dollars for my benefit, and that is the policy.”

Julia Waring drew a long breath, and opened her big blue eyes wide with amazement. “Well! of all birthday gifts, that strikes me as little the most peculiar, and one that I should’nt at all fancy. One of those agents was boring Charley only the other day with his platitudes about the benefits of life assurance, and actually I believe that Charley would have been influenced by his arguments if it had’nt been for me. You see he left two or three little books for him to read and digest at his leisure, but I gave them to Bridget to kindle the fire with, and so I trust the subject is quite at rest. It must have been a disappointment to you May to get a Life Assurance Policy for your birthday gift, I would’nt have believed that Russell could be such a goose. Own up now Mamie dear. Did’nt you feel disappointed?”

“On the contrary my dear friend, I cannot tell you how dearly I prize this most tender expression of my husband’s love. Life is uncertain at best, and it touches me to my heart’s core to know that if my noble husband should be taken from me,” and her beautiful eyes grew brighter with tears at the thought, “he has laid up in this policy a fund that would save little Maud and I from pecuniary suffering at least. O Julia! how

could we bear that, already crushed to the earth beneath the cross of orphanage and widowhood?" and the tones had grown so low and tremulous that the last word was a whisper.

"There is a deal of sentiment in your view of the subject according to my way of thinking, Mamie dear. Excuse me, but as a symbol of affection I infinitely prefer my beautiful diamond! '*De gustibus non disputandum est*' you know. But really, I must run, for Bridget will be sure to let the birthday cake bake itself, and I should be sadly mortified if it should have a heavy streak in the middle. Of course you and Russell will come over this evening, you will meet only a few 'mutual friends,' so you need'nt get up a very elaborate toilet. '*Au reservoir*' as Charley would say.

CHAPTER II.

"O nonsense Charley! Every body knows that in a few years you will be one of the firm of Chase & Co. Then surely you are on the high road to fortune! So in about ten years I shall expect to see Charley Waring, *our* name you know, on the door plate of one of those elegant brown stone houses in Montgomery place, and I shall drive the very handsomest pair of bays in the Park, and as my taste is not at all extravagant, I shall not think of wearing anything more expensive than black velvet and diamonds. So can't you possess your soul in patience for a little while?"

But Julia, foolish child! suppose I should die within these ten years! What then would become of my poor ewe lamb? You know I am living on a salary, a large one it is true; but if I should die, the only source of income for yourself and

little Florence would cease at once. I have been talking the matter over seriously with Rush Clayton this morning, and he urges me to assure at once, says he has known no peace like that which has dwelt in his heart since he placed in his wife's hands the policy securing her a competence beyond any possible contingency. Why Julia! our pastor, Mr. Beecher, says that it is the plain duty of every christian man to assure his life. He is your oracle on most subjects. I wish you didn't feel so about this matter, it seems to me really important."

"Charley, you freeze my heart with your gloomy forebodings! Mr. Beecher is'nt infallible any more than any body else, and I do'nt thank Rush Clayton for putting such absurd ideas in your head," and tears almost angry sprang to her eyes as she exclaimed, "and as for that Life Assurance agent who has followed you like a fate, all these weeks, harping—harping—harping—on that one everlasting string, I wish he was in Guinea, and furthermore I will take this occasion to say that I believe the whole business of Life Assurance to be a humbug, and all this sentiment about Philanthropy, and these societies providing the widows and orphans of the land with an unknown quantity of bread and butter for the rest of their mortal lives; well! it is all "stranded on a drowsy ear," in this case at all events, for I hav'nt a scintilla of faith in any such rhapsodical twaddle. So please don't say another word about it, that's a good boy, and I'll play this lovely new mazourka for you." Mrs. Waring sat down to the elegant Decker piano, and the *diamond ring* flashed on her white hand along the keys which rang out silver harmonies. Her husband thoughtfully lighted a segar, and gave himself up to the full

comfort of home, but still the small voice would not be hushed, but deeper than the music could fathom, far down in the adyta of his heart, the utterance would make itself heard: "If any man provide not for his own he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel."

CHAPTER III.

Reader, will you go with me to the home of Russell Clayton? The dark angel Azrael has shadowed that threshold with his sable wings for many days.

"Doctor"—it is the broken voice of his wife—"is there hope?" "God alone knows my child. Trust Him! your husband has a powerful constitution, or he could not have resisted this fever so long. When it leaves him, if there are no business cares to disturb and harass him, if his mind as well as his body, may have *perfect rest*, he may be spared, otherwise, it is better to tell you the truth, there is no hope.

Tenderly as a young mother watches the slumber of her first-born, faithfully and anxiously, as she realized the full danger of her husband's situation, did Mary Clayton watch, almost without food or rest until that terrible fever, drunk with the rich purple wine of her husband's life, left him stranded back upon the shore of Time, with scarcely a breath stirring the linen that covered his bosom. How each hour dragged its slow length along. Ah! how would it be when Day came knocking at the eastern gates? Would he have already "borne hope's tender blossoms into the Silent Land?" The thin hand lay passive in the clasp of his wife, and once again she asked "Doctor, is there hope?"

“He will rally if there is no care on his mind. Do you know about his business? He may worry about the time lost on this sick bed; perhaps his income ceases for the time, and worse than all, if he believes that he will not recover, and distresses his mind with fears concerning the support of yourself and child when he is gone. Any of these may occasion disquietude enough to bring on a return of fever. Do you know, dear child, how it is?”

Sadly poor Mary bowed her head, and she could hardly speak for the tears, “alas! I do not know.”

“He is conscious now, but too weak to speak. Give him the whey, one teaspoonful at a time. Keep the room dark and quiet, and if possible, let his first conscious impressions be cheerful. But what is the matter child?”

For a light had dawned in Mary’s eyes, and a blessed inspiration flew into her heart, as without stopping to answer the good doctor, she glided noiselessly past him, down the basement stairs, and into the dining room, where hanging over the mantel, and looking her honestly in the face from its pretty rosewood frame, was the Life Policy, her precious birthday gift. Taking it carefully down, she carried it to the sick room, and selecting a position, hung it where the sick man would see it as soon as he opened his eyes.

And when he had strength enough to speak, the kind old physician heard him say; Mary! that policy has saved my life, by assuring me that you and our darling little daughter would be safe from want, even if it should please God to call me out from your presence forever. There is no need for worry now, heart and brain may rest, and I know I shall get well.

And if ever there was a hymn of true thanksgiving, it went up from that household, as Mary Clayton knelt by her husband's bedside, and with his thin hand pressed close to her heart, thanked God for Life Assurance.

CHAPTER IV.

Only two years had passed. Fortune had dealt kindly with Russell Clayton, and he was traveling with his wife in Europe. It was a lovely September morning, and even in London the day was bright and clear; and as our friends sat in their cosy private breakfast room at the Morley house, Mary asked quietly! "Have you the Herald, Russell?"

"No, the American steamer had just arrived, but the waiter said he would bring up the paper as soon as it came in."

"O dear! I feel as blue as one of Homer's ships this morning, and I shall be glad to see a newspaper from home. I think even the advertisements in a New York journal will be intensely interesting."

"Well you must indeed be hungry for home news—another cup of coffee please—ah! here comes the waiter now. As that functionary entered bearing a goodly package of letters besides one or two of the New York dailies.

"We'll have a right jolly morning with these, eh, Mary?"

"Yes indeed, I'm all through breakfast, so do hurry up and see dear Rush, if there is a letter for me from Jule Waring. Her 'majestic silence is appalling' for I wrote her from Paris, giving our address here several weeks ago."

Mr. Clayton shuffled over the package of letters, but the coveted missive was not among them. Indeed the letters were

nearly all business communications, and so of little interest to Mrs. Clayton, who exclaimed impatiently: "Well, I really think she might have written, and I hope the ghost of that broken promise will haunt her for a week. Please give me the Herald, Russell, perhaps I can solace myself with some account of the brilliant proceedings in our American Congress. Good gracious! how it would make these Parliamentary gentlemen stare if they could realize how we rush things at Washington. I wonder what distinguished members of that most august conclave are at sword's points now. I hope somebody's quarreling for I should enjoy it in my present frame of mind." Mrs. Clayton said this with a pretty affectation of crossness, and as her husband looked up and smiled, she continued a desultory conversation, as she carefully looked over the columns of the print in her hand. "O Russell! this is a Saturday's paper two weeks old, and Mr. Beecher was to preach at dear old 'Plymouth' on the Sunday following. O, wont it be pleasant to get back home again, and sit in our own pew and have the bread of life broken by our beloved Pastor's hands once more. I think I can hear the solemn swell of the organ now, as that great congregation rises to sing 'Shining Shore.' You may talk as much as you please about the solemn worship in the Cathedrals of the old world, but—what—what is this? Heavenly Father have mercy! Russell look here!" and Mary Clayton burst into tears as she thrust the paper into her husband's hands, and he read: "We regret to announce that Mr. Charles Waring, who was thrown from a carriage while driving with a friend in Central Park yesterday, died this morning from exhaustion produced by internal hemorrhage."

Mary threw her arms around her husband's neck, "O, Russell—Russell darling—what will poor Julia do? Charley killed! O, is it not *too* dreadful!"

Mr. Clayton knit his brows with an expression of pain. "Yes, it is a sudden blow and a dreadful one. My old chum has gone to his rest before me at last. Poor fellow! I had hoped to see his kind face first, on the other side of the water, and to take his honest hand in friendly greeting once more. Sad news little Mary! He was a very prince of a friend, and one "who bore without abuse, the grand old name of Gentleman."

"And only to think, that I have just been reproaching my poor Jule for not writing, when if I had only known, that God had laid His hand upon her so heavily, that she was left in this sad world, without husband, father or mother, alone save baby Florence, to drift about in this life, and be driven by every storm. O, Russell what can the poor child do?"

"Did you not tell me sometime ago, that they took a furnished house last spring?"

"Yes, and at an enormous rent too; Jule said tney would not buy furniture until Charley was able to have a house of his own. I do not think they owned anything but the piano."

"Of course then she will have to give up her home. Indeed, I think she must have done so already. However, I will telegraph immediately, and see how matters stand."

The telegram was sent, and the answer came that Mrs. Waring was dangerously ill.

Mr. and Mrs. Clayton were among the passengers on the next steamer, homeward bound.

CHAPTER V.

It was Saturday morning, and Mrs. Clayton was down stairs, as all good housekeepers should be, and with Bridget as "*aid-de-cuisine*:" was deep in the mysteries of baking. Robed in a pretty calico dress, with a white apron tied neatly before it, and sleeves rolled up above the elbows of her plump white arms, she was deftly putting the finishing touches to her first apple pie, when her husband literally *rushed* in, and taking her by the waist whirled her round the room in an impromptu and dizzy galop.

"Why Russell! What is the matter? Are you crazy? There! You've dropped your glove in the butter, and your cigar in the pudding dish."

"Well, never mind the butter or the pudding dish! We'll throw them into the ash barrel, and get new. I say May!"

"Well dear!"

"How long will it take you to get on your waterfall, and button boots, and other traps, eh? I want you to go out with me, right away."

"O, I can be ready in just two minutes, but mercy, Russell, it is Saturday morning, and only think of the baking!"

"Never mind the baking, Bridget can finish that well enough. So come right along! I'm in a desperate hurry."

"Well, I'll go of course, but I must insist on thinking it a very peculiar circumstance for you to come home this time of day, and take me off on a wild goose chase, in this style," And Mrs. Clayton ran up stairs, and in a few minutes, descended

neatly arrayed in walking dress, and awaited with tolerably good patience "further developments."

"Come along sis; I'm going round to Jule Waring's this morning to 'kick up a bit of a bobbery,' and I want you to be there to enjoy the latest dramatic sensation in the way of a little domestic tragedy, improvised for the occasion." And seizing a rectangular package, which had been patiently waiting in the hall, Mr. Clayton accompanied by his wife sallied forth into the street.

Walking a considerable distance from the quiet, genteel street where they lived, our friends stopped at last before a shabby genteel, two story brick house, in an obscure neighborhood, where, living on the second floor, Julia Waring received music pupils at ten dollars a quarter.

"Ugh! how this first floor smells of onions! Only think of Charley Waring's wife perched up on the second floor of such a tenement as this! It is a burning shame! But the independent little witch would slave herself to death before she would accept aid or comfort from any son of Adam living, even if it were her own brother. I want you to listen while I make her confess that she pawned her diamond ring, less than a month ago, rather than accept a loan from me."

Ringling the cracked bell, which returned anything but a silvery peal, for the desperate pull Rush Clayton gave it. Julia Waring sadly thin and pale since we saw her last, appeared at the door and welcomed her friends.

"Good morning, my dear Julia! I know you are wondering what 'ill wind' blew us both round here this morning, but Rush invited me to come, and has neglected to vouchsafe me

his confidence as regards the why and wherefore. Dont you think it a very singular proceeding, for a business man to be making calls, at this time of day ? ”

“ Well I’m very glad to see you both, for to acknowledge the truth, I feel a little tired this morning, and it will rest me to look at you.”

“ Well, the fact of the business is, Mrs. Waring, that vacant space on the wall, just over your piano there, has always been a sort of eye-sore to me, so I have taken the liberty of having a little engraving that I chanced to find in my safe this morning, framed for its especial adornment. It is a nice little bit of art, (*proceeding to open the package*)—represents two very beautiful female figures, one, that holiest of all subjects ‘ Mother and Child,’ sacred since the Madonna, and the other, the good genius of some benevolent institution. Hurrah ! little woman ! I feel like a boiler about to explode ! The long and short of it all is, that this morning in looking through my safe, I found a package of papers that Charley had placed there, while we were abroad May, you know I left the key with him, and among them I found this *Policy*. Dont you see May, it is just like yours, and it assures Julia in case of Charley’s death, ten thousand dollars, and I’ve been up to the office, and the money is all ready. Ten thousand dollars my dear ! Ten thousand in the Equitable ! Hurrah for the Equitable, little woman ! Long may it wave ! But I’ll be hanged if Julia has’nt fainted, you are crying like all possessed, and so am I. Hurry up ! Make her come to, and get on your traps, for I feel like the boy in the ‘ Black Crook.’ ‘ *I want to go home.*’ Look up you

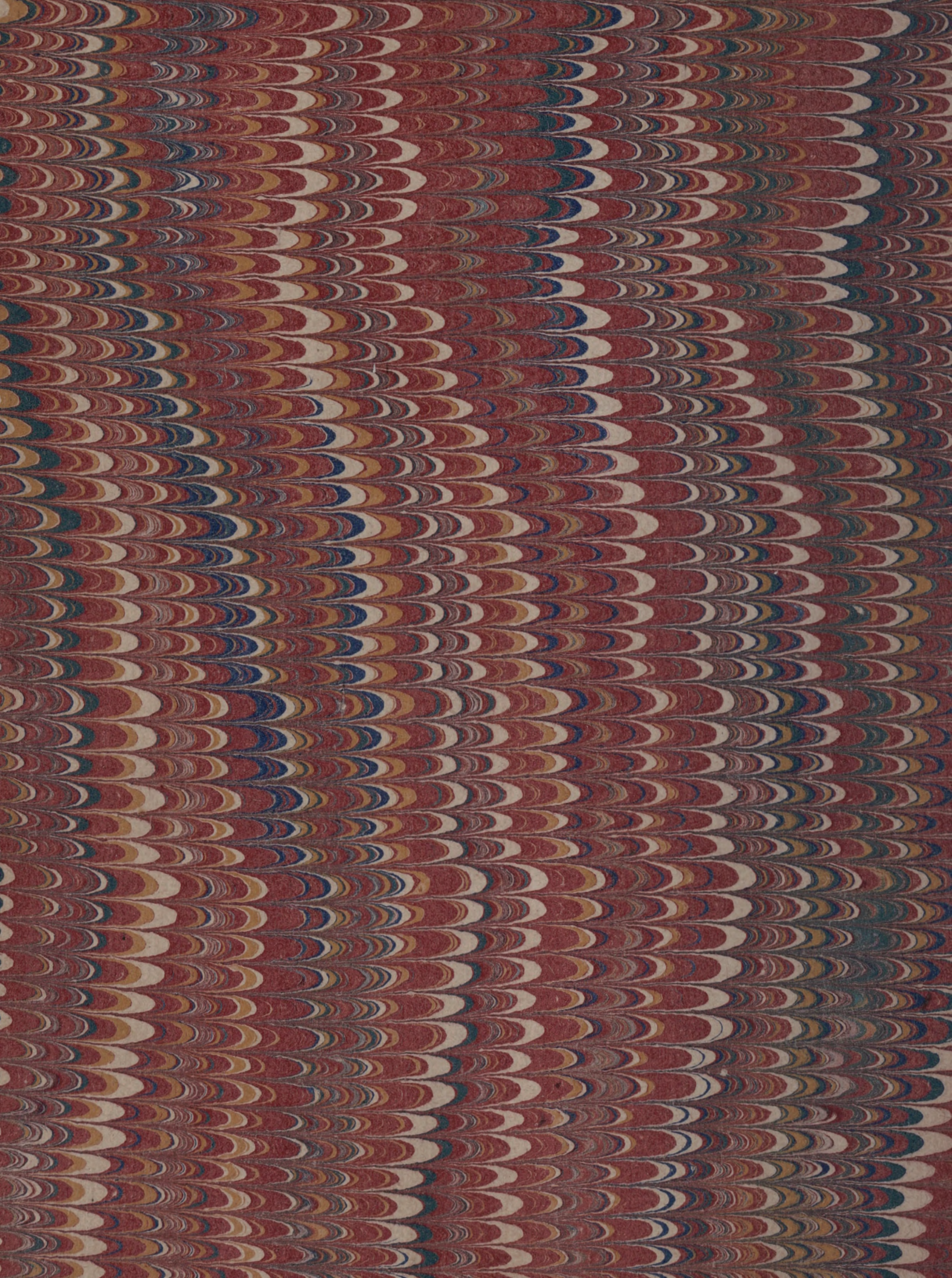
poor little widow ! God bless you ! I hope Charley can see this from the *other side*."

"O my poor dead darling ! O Charley ! Charley ! To think your precious love has followed me and watches over me from beyond the grave. O, how can I be thankful enough," and she buried her white face on her dear friend's bosom, and Mary hugged and kissed her over and over again, and there never was such a time, no reader, not within the memory of the "oldest inhabitant."

"And now, let me ask one question and then I'm off, and May, you may stay and help pack up, for I'm going right off to take that nice new house for Julia, just next ours, and you two women will be in Paradise. Come, Mrs. Waring, be kind enough to give me the name and address of that cursed old scamp to whom you pledged your diamond ring. You see I've found you out ! It must sparkle on your finger again before night. Good morning ! I must hurry home, and see how Bridget gets along with the baking, eh, Mary !"

* * * * * *

The next morning, while the dew was yet fresh upon the flowers, at Greenwood, Julia Waring knelt beside poor Charley's grave, and gave thanks that "some of the tears of the widow may be wiped away, and some of the cries of the fatherless be hushed."





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